

THE AMERICAN CONFLICT.

Mr. Henry Vincent's Lecture at the Academy of Music Last Evening.—With Some Account of the Lecturer's Eventful Career.

Last evening, Mr. Henry Vincent, the English Reformer, and a steadfast friend of the United States, made his first appearance before a Philadelphia audience. The Academy was fairly filled, and the audience, in point of intelligence, was one of the finest which we ever remember to have seen.

The speaker being comparatively unknown in this country, we deem the present occasion an opportune one for giving the public some account of his career.

The Career of Henry Vincent.

Mr. Vincent was the son of a silversmith, and was born in London about the year 1816. Being left an orphan at the age of fourteen, he was then apprenticed to a printer in the town of Hull, remaining with him until he attained his majority. In his early boyhood he imbibed the most radical sentiments, and at fifteen was a member of the council of the Hull Political Union. His apprenticeship over, he returned to London with his mother, and became at once a leader in all the reformatory and philanthropic movements which were at that time agitating the country. He brought to the cause of reform an untiring zeal, and, above all, a most persuasive style of eloquence. At the time of the great Chartist demonstration in 1839, he was found in the leading ranks. This was the unparelleled sin for which he was arrested, thrown into prison, and there detained until 1841. The attention of Parliament was at last drawn to his case by Sergeant Talford, then Attorney-General of England. The debate which followed resulted in the Queen's being advised to grant him a full pardon.

Mr. Vincent came forth from his prison walls to find himself an idol of the English people. Before his release from imprisonment, he had been proposed as a candidate for Parliament from the town of Banbury. To the electors of this borough he addressed an eloquent circular, dated "Oakham Gaol, Rutlandshire, November 21, 1840," in which we find the following sentences:—

"Countrymen, I write in a prison. Day after day my body drags upon the same monotonous career; but my mind scornfully defies the power of the tyrant, and pleasantly speculates upon principles which will yet shake our crazy and unjust system of government to pieces. Every hour of my imprisonment fortifies my mind for further action; and whenever I please the Almighty to restore me to liberty, no exertion shall be wanting on my part to open the eyes of the ignorant and deluded, to improve the vicious and the drunken, to rouse the apathetic, and confirm and give confidence to the enthusiastic, and to join cordially with the wise and good who are resolved upon making a grand, persevering, and peaceful struggle for a real representative government, the paramount object of which shall be to diffuse amongst all classes of the people the greatest attainable amount of human happiness."

This address has been the key-note to his subsequent career. As a matter of course, he was defeated as a candidate for Parliament; meeting with the same fate when he subsequently stood for York, Ipswich, and Tewkesbury. At the moment of his first defeat he has been untiring and unceasing in his efforts to stir the hearts of the English people in the cause of enlightened reform. His medium of communication with the people has been the same which he has adopted in this country—that of public lectures; and it is said that there is scarcely a hamlet in the three kingdoms where he has not spoken at least once during the twenty-five years which have elapsed since his release from imprisonment. His great collaborator in this special work has been George Dawson, of Birmingham; and these two have, for a quarter of a century, stood at the head of popular English lecturers. And during all this time he has labored steadily in forwarding all the measures of the extreme Liberal party, enjoying the friendship and co-operation of such sterling reformers as Cobden, Bright, Joseph Hume, and Sir Joshua Walsley.

In addition to all this, he has taken a leading part in securing the repeal of the English Corn laws; in aiding the Hungarian and Italian Revolutions; in forwarding the objects of the Peace Congresses of Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and Manchester; in endeavoring to interest the working classes in the great World's Exhibition, having been a member of the Bishop of Oxford's Committee for that purpose; in opposing the Crimean war; and, finally, in advocating the cause of the North in the great conflict of our own country. In this last cause he is said to have delivered at least two hundred lectures in different parts of the United Kingdom.

Having determined to visit the United States, with whose institutions and future career he is in thorough sympathy, he made his project known to John Bright, and received from that gentleman a letter dated July 19, 1856, in which we find the following passages:—

"After the warm interest you have taken in the restoration of the Union, you will delight to see the work in process of completion, and I doubt not you will find many persons to whom your name and labors are well known. I hope you will come back full of knowledge on this great question, so that you may employ your great powers of speech in making England understand what Englishmen in America have done to make instruction as universal as air and water are."

On the evening of November 16, Mr. Vincent made his first appearance before a New York audience, lecturing in the Cooper Institute to a large and enthusiastic assemblage.

Mr. Vincent's Lecture Last Evening.

At the appointed hour last evening Mr. Vincent appeared at the Academy of Music, and was appropriately introduced by Colonel John W. Forney. Throughout the address which followed, the speaker was repeatedly interrupted by applause, which at times was fairly enthusiastic. Especially when he referred to the martyred Lincoln, his hearers were deeply affected, and more than one handkerchief was brought into requisition. Mr. Vincent's address was substantially as follows:—

The speaker said he would not venture on any remarks as to the internal policy of America or its conflict of parties, as he did not deem such to belong to the duties of a foreigner. He had full confidence in the capacity of the American people to settle these matters for themselves. Still, he might view the late great conflict on this soil in a manner that was not purely American, and that had a bearing on the vast continent of Europe. He came from a country, where the late struggle was looked upon as an indication of the decline of our national powers; but where there were a few who defended America

—more important than himself—such as Cobden, Bright, and others. These men, in the darkest night of England's history on this great question, were heard to utter a language of prophecy which has been practically realized by the glorious success of this noble country. He did not wonder at the question, "How is it that the English nation appears to look coldly upon this great conflict, in America, between freedom and anarchy, between those great principles which have been conflicting with more or less distinctness since man became partially educated, and the Christian religion exercised a wider influence over the nations of the world?"

The speaker was not here to satisfactorily answer this question, but he would show that it was but another illustration of the fact that there have been certain distinct camps, the members of which may not all adopt the same creed or the same opinion. In one camp are the enemies of progress, the defenders of superstition, the opposers of every honest, honest, and certain atheistical regard of the Providential government of the world by God, have no faith in Providence, and an intense fear of the people. In the other camp are the men of faith, of genius, of progressive thought, who believe in civilization, and are the champions of liberty. It had been the destiny of America not only to strangle anarchy and overthrow slavery in her own land, but to light the beacon of freedom, and to kindle the hope in the friends of liberty throughout the world.

At the inception of the Rebellion England was placed in peculiar circumstances. In the first place the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had been effected, and an intense faith in material things—a belief in good wages, good profits, large exports, great imports—was spread abroad. These are sometimes placed too much in the way of those spiritual, moral, and intellectual considerations which constitute the true forces by which patriotic nations are upheld and strengthened. A political faith was thus engendered, the more difficult to master because of the military passions evoked during the Russian war. Not a few good men, however, believed as Lord Chatham did in the great Revolutionary struggle, and advocated the policy of "non-intervention," which would give each nation the same rights which England claimed for herself.

There were difficulties in questions of home policy; yet the upper classes believed the time was approaching when workingmen would demand a more extended franchise, that would overthrow the remnant of that feudal monopoly by which the aristocracy of England has hitherto been upheld. In this state of things there were three parties:—First, there was the old Tory party of the blessed days of George the Third, which believed in the Divine right of kings, from which concession after concession has been wrung by public opinion. They said slavery would destroy America, and so it would have not Americans destroyed slavery. The second was the old Whig party, which still possessed much power in England, which was renowned as resisting the Stuart family. This party was neutral during the war, that is, were enemies of America. Yet this party contained some crutches, cantankerous men, like Mr. Roebuck, who were a kind of vinegar crust on the two sides. With the exception of these men, almost all of that party stood on the Northern side. They believed a great political reaction was designed to be effected through the Rebellion. Men like Lord Derby and Disraeli were too wise to prophesy against America, while all others of their party were speaking against the want of monarchical cohesion in a republic. The understrata of those parties, especially the dissenting, drawing-room, dandy-dick nobles, went down to mechanics' institutes in the country to speak on the anatomy of the fly, or the spots on the wings of a butterfly, which they always declared to be legitimate questions, which would not injure the working classes.

At the close of their philosophic incubations, however, they generally wound up in this style: "Gentlemen, there's another question to which must submit before I take my leave of this audience, and that question is, 'What is to be done on the other side of the Atlantic, and I trust, gentlemen, that that state of things will be a warning to you all, not to put your confidence in democratic institutions, and not to believe in people who have risen from the ranks, and who have not had these advantages, these distinguished advantages, such as we have possessed.'"

There, continued Mr. Vincent, were soon found to be a subtle kind of men, who were endangering a war between America and England. England is a slow country, and she is not waking in power. There is life in the old dog yet. Englishmen dislike agitation, and they generally dislike the last new thing—except it be a thing created by themselves. The Queen was not to blame; she was inclined in the direction of American property, as also had been Prince Albert. But monarchical power is stronger than the throne in England. The news of Northern successes brought around the feelings of many. In a meeting recently held at Hyde Park, which was addressed by John Bright, he had seen thousands marching and singing the American hymn, "John Brown's body lies moldering in the ground." It was said that Americans did not mean to destroy slavery, and Russell had said that the North was fighting for dominion, and the South for independence. He had always been a abolitionist, and when the glorious flag was fired upon at Fort Sumter, he had said, "Slavery is dead and gone forever." There had always been great ignorance of the true issues of the struggle in England.

Another question was propounded, whether a republic had a right to conserve itself, an argument which was used differently by England when treating the cases of Ireland, Canada, or Cape of Good Hope. Many believed the contest here was a struggle between North America and South America. Ignorance was an important ally of the Tory classes in their efforts against this country. The speaker gave some amusing illustrations of the prejudice against Americans in England, and of our ideas of England, and then alluded to the London Standard, which had assailed America, especially through the highfalutin letters of "Manhattan," whom the lecturer afterwards found to be a Yankee, though by the rapidity he uttered he had supposed him to be an Englishman. But the journal that was at the head and front of the great effort against America was the powerful Times newspaper. He was glad that the proprietor of that paper, Mr. Water, was now in America, and hoped he would judge for himself how his correspondents had misrepresented this country. It had a circulation of sixty thousand daily, circulated in the upper classes, and exercised great influence. It originated in Liverpool and elsewhere the means of injuring America, and vessels were equipped on the high seas to be sent against her. The cotton loan was written on an order of rare advantage, but this must have been an imaginary thing, based on imaginary bales of cotton, supported by cobwebs, which the loyal swords of the North had brushed away, for nobody could now be seen who rested in that case, or who knew anybody that did. They no longer believe the Alabama claims are to be settled by a peaceful commission, and that Americans, as conquerors, were bound to acknowledge the validity of the cotton loan—that in the event of an honor in them, which could hardly be expected from "Yankees!" Blockade runners were at first in high glee, but were rather sorry after their cargoes and vessels were seized.

Mr. Vincent spoke eloquently of the Englishmen who were staunch friends of America during the war, mentioning Richard Cobden, John Bright, Milner Gibson, Charles Gibson, Goldwin Smith, Professor Cairnes, John Stuart Mill, and others. He mentioned the friendly newspapers were the Daily News, Morning Star, a penny paper, the Leeds Mercury, Manchester Examiner, the Nottingham Journal, the Northern Whig, and others. The speaker paid a glowing tribute to the virtues of Abraham Lincoln, and alluded to the fact that he had been applauded always when alluded to in the three hundred meetings which he had addressed in favor of the cause of liberty and Union. The London Times had even named him when the sad and startling intelligence reached England that he had been murdered. The enemies of America

then predicted that anarchy would ensue; but the machinery of government still moved quietly on. The working classes of Yorkshire and Lancashire, when they learned that this was a struggle against slavery, in the face of starvation, upheld the Northern cause. Yet the London Times had prophesied disaster continually to the Federal republic. It spoke of the march of Sherman to Savannah and Charleston—and prophesied that Lincoln would not be re-elected. Its military criticisms were rebuked by the Military and Naval Gazette. Through its teachings every one was talking of "they're drawing him from his base!"—while alluding to Sherman's victorious march. It was a species of lunacy which was caught from the Times newspaper—the paper which made American rivers reverse the law of gravity, and which would have been pronounced by the professor of an asylum as a desperate case. The speaker said the darkest day he ever experienced was when the death of Abraham Lincoln was communicated to him; and he touchingly described an audience he was to address, but whom he found bathed in tears. It was a credit to old England that, from the Queen down to the humblest subject, all expressed their sincere distress at the death of the great man. He thought England would wipe out the stain left on the British escutcheon by the Alabama that had let British waters, but large portions could not swing speedily around the circle. He was glad America had vindicated herself, and eloquently urged the people on in their great work, not only for the future destinies of this country, but for its effect also on Italy, Prussia, France, England, Switzerland, and other European countries.

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